The Importance of a Strong Password

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Creating Strong and Unique Passwords Matter

The first line of defense against hackers is your password. One of the most common ways hackers break into computers is by guessing – or worse, by having a computer try over and over again. Simple and regularly used passwords can give unauthorized access to your devices and accounts in a matter of seconds. A strong password is essential to protect your computer, personal information, and from financial fraud and identity theft.

The stronger the password, the more protected your information is from hackers, malicious software, or cyber threats.

Qualities of a Strong Password:

The Dos:

- At least 12 characters – the more characters the better
- A mixture of both uppercase and lowercase letters
- A mixture of letters and numbers
- Inclusion of at least one special character, e.g., !@#?
- Note: Change passwords on a regular basis.

The Don’ts

- Do not use < or > in your password, as both can cause problems in Web browsers
- Stay away from dictionary words and combinations of dictionary words. Any word on its own is bad. Any combination of a few words, especially if it is obvious, is also bad, for example “house” or “Red house”.

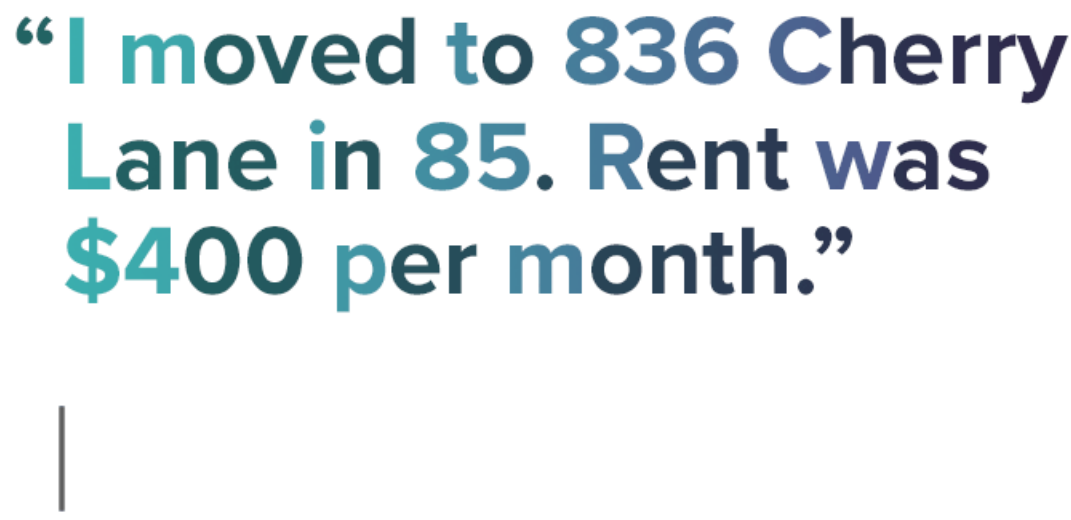
- Do not rely on obvious substitutions, for example “H0use”, replacing the o with a 0.
- Do not use personal information.
- Do not type passwords on devices or networks you do not control.

Create Strong Passwords - And Remember It

The best way to secure your passwords is by using a password manager, such as 1Password or Dashlane, which creates strong passwords and remembers it for you. But even then, you still need to create and remember your password for your password manager. Despite meeting all the requirements listed above, some passwords can still be obvious. For example “YellowBike$123” may fit the requirements, but it is not the strongest. It is a dictionary phrase where each word is capitalized, all the numbers are at the end, and the order is easy to guess.

Remember a Memorable Phrase

Here is a good method of creating a password that is memorable. Make a specific and perhaps personal phrase and turn it into a password by using the first digits of each word. For example, *“I moved to 836 Cherry Lane in 85. Rent was $400 per month”*. This would be ***Imt836CLi85Rw$4pm***. This is a strong password at 17 characters. Memorizing a couple simple sentences can go a long way.



The Passphrase/Diceware Method

Choose four random words and string them together to create a passphrase – a password that involves multiple words. The randomness of the word choice and length of the passphrase makes it strong. For example, let's use *pineapple, desk, canopy,* and *comfort.* Then apply a pattern where you join the words by alternating symbols and numbers like "3" and "@", as well as capitalizing the third character of each word. You'd end up with ***"deSk3piNeapple@caNopy3coMfort"***– long, complicated, and containing numbers, symbols, and capital letters. This is still much easier to remember than a randomized password.

1. Chris Hoffman, "How to Create a Strong Password (and Remember It)" Ho-To Geek, May 9, 2018, https://www.howtogeek.com/195430/how-to-create-a-strong-password-and-remember-it/

2. "The Importance of Strong, Secure Passwords" Secure Data Recovery, 2021, https://www.securedatarecovery.com/resources/the-importance-of-strong-secure-passwords